



**Kevin McCauley**  
Editor-in-Chief

# O'Dwyer's Newsletter



**The Inside News of  
PR and Marketing  
Communications**

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## WPP REVENUES SLIP 1.3% IN 2018

WPP reported a 1.3 percent drop in 2018 revenues to \$20.6B and an 8.8 percent decline in profits to \$2.3B as CEO Mark Read begins his three-year turnaround plan to make the UK giant a more client-centric operation focused on creativity and technology.



**Mark Read**

The company reported \$310M in restructuring and transformation costs during Q4 and \$400M for the full year.

Headcount dipped 1.2 percent to 133,903 at yearend.

WPP, which is looking for a financial and strategic partner for Kantar, made 36 “disposals” since last April, which strengthened its balance

sheet by raising about \$1.1B in cash.

Since Read’s Investor Day presentation in December, WPP has completed 70 of its 100 planned office mergers, shuttered 57 of its targeted 80 offices and says 2,650 of the 3,500 planned “redundancies have been actioned,” according to its financial report.

He cited PR and PA as the strongest performing segments during Q4 with a 3.3 percent growth in constant currencies and a 1.2 percent spurt on a like-to-like basis, respectively. The group was down 0.4 percent on a reported basis to \$1.5B for 2018.

BCW Global, Hill+Knowlton Strategies, Finsbury and Buchanan were singled out as strong performers.

The WPP chief expects 2019 will be a challenging year, especially during the first-half due to “headwinds from client losses in 2018.” His primary focus this year is boosting business in North America.

## Lures Wal-Mart’s People Person

Read has hired Jacqui Canney, executive VP-chief people officer at Wal-Mart Inc., to oversee talent management, leadership development, rewards and recruiting activities. At \$500B Wal-Mart, Canney was charged with empowering its more than 2M employees in 27 countries.



**Jacqui Canney**

Prior to Wal-Mart, Canney worked at Accenture for 25 years, a period in which its employee level soared from 21,000 to more than 300,000.

As WPP’s global chief people officer, she is to “build a new culture that empowers people to do their best work.”

Canney will report to Read when she joins the firm June. 1. She will succeed Mark Linaugh, who is retiring.

## UWM SEEKS BRAND STRATEGY SERVICES

The University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee has issued an RFP for qualified agencies to provide a suite of brand strategy marketing services.

The Milwaukee-based public research university, which enrolls more than 27,000 students and offers more than 190 degree programs, is looking for agencies that can provide the following services: ad buying (for both traditional and digital media); market research (quantitative and qualitative); creative content production (including digital, print, television and radio); and a strategic institutional branding campaign (brand identity, brand strategy, visioning and the development of creative direction and brand story).



The services sought in the RFP are broken into six lots: traditional ad buying, digital ad buying, quantitative market research, qualitative market research, creative content production and brand campaign work. Bidders may submit proposals for only one or multiple lots, and UWM reserves the right to award contracts to one or six separate proposers.

Terms of the work will be for one year, beginning on July 1, with the option of four more one-year terms.

Proposals are due by 9:00 a.m. (CT) on March 26.

Submissions should go to [uwmbids@uwm.edu](mailto:uwmbids@uwm.edu), with the subject line of the email containing “RFP P19-013-024 response” followed by “[agency name].”

Forward questions to [uwmbids@uwm.edu](mailto:uwmbids@uwm.edu). Contact is RFP manager Pam Loignon.

[Download the RFP \(PDF\)](#).

## PRSA NAMES MATEO CCO

PRSA has named Karen Mateo chief communications officer. She will be responsible for developing and implementing the PRSA’s overall strategic communication goals, reporting to CEO Joe Truncale.

Mateo was previously a senior vice president at North 6th Agency, where her duties included development of product positioning, executive visibility and thought leadership for agency clients.

She was previously SVP of communications for CBS Radio, responsible for all communications functions for its 120+ radio stations and portfolio of digital media properties.



**Karen Mateo**

Mateo has also served as director of communications for CBS 2 New York and as a senior press representative for CBS Sports.

## NAVAL OFFICERS ASSN. FLOATS PR RFP

The National Naval Officers Assn., which promotes the recruitment, development and retention of a diverse officer corps to strengthen the fighting capabilities of the sea services, has floated an RFP for PR support.



The Alexandria, VA-based group is composed of US Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard active duty, reserve and retired officers; academies; ROTC midshipmen and cadets; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration officers and interested civilians.

NNOA, which does not employ a full-time PR staffer, is looking to “bring visibility to ongoing operations, accomplishments and significant events.”

It envisions a partner to manage day-to-day communications, develop website content, write press releases, attend events, design marketing tools and produce social media material.

Deadline to respond to the RFP is March 12. Responses go to LCDR B. Henderson at [treasurer@nnoa.org](mailto:treasurer@nnoa.org).

[Download RFP \(PDF\)](#).

## FTI'S PR UNIT POSTS 6.7% Q4 GAIN

FTI Consulting's strategic communications group posted a 6.7 percent jump in Q4 revenues to \$58M as global segment leader Mark McCall wrapped up a “fantastic year.” Operating income rose to \$10M from \$4.9M a year ago.

McCall told O'Dwyer's the upbeat performance represented a “continual build of the business” over the past four years. The stratcomm unit achieved across-the-board growth driven by the rise in business from mergers/acquisitions, crisis management and shareholder activism.

McCall also noted that secular trends (nationalism, tariffs and sanctions) boosted FTI.

He expects continued growth in 2019, especially in FTI's hub operations in New York, Washington, London and Brussels.



**Mark McCall**

For 2018, FTI's stratcomm unit chalked up \$223.3M in revenues, up 16.1 percent from 2017. Operating income soared to \$37.3M from \$13.2M.

### **Equifax Data Breach Crisis Vet Joins Firm**

Meredith Griffanti, who was strategy & communications leader for the office of transformation at Equifax, has joined FTI as managing director in its crisis & issues management practice.

At Equifax, Griffanti worked enterprise messaging during the 2017 data breach that compromised the personal information of nearly 150M consumers. FTI has advised Equifax. Earlier, she was international PA leader in charge of engagement for 10 Latin American countries.

FTI also added Capitol Hill veteran Cory Fritz to its public affairs group in DC office. He worked with former Speaker John Boehner for six years and most recently was on the staff of Congressman Ed Royce when he chaired the foreign relations committee.

## DENNIS PUBLISHING ACQUIRES KIPLINGER

U.K. media company Dennis Publishing has acquired Kiplinger, publisher of personal finance magazine *Kiplinger's Personal Finance*. Terms of the deal weren't publicly disclosed.

Washington-based Kiplinger was founded by W. M. Kiplinger in 1920. *Kiplinger's Personal Finance*, which has been continuously published since 1947, has a monthly circulation of more than 600,000. Kiplinger also publishes the *Kiplinger Letter*, a weekly business forecasting periodical, biweekly tax advisory newsletter *Kiplinger Tax Letter*, retirement living monthly *Kiplinger's Retirement Report* and monthly newsletter *Investing for Income*.



Kiplinger editor-in-chief Knight Kiplinger, who succeeded his father, Austin H. Kiplinger, now holds the title of editor emeritus, and will serve as an informal advisor to Kiplinger and Dennis on editorial content. Magazine-media news site Folio reported that no further staff changes would occur at this time.

London-based Dennis, which was founded in 1974, manages a portfolio of more than 30 brands, including flagship title *The Week*, which is published in both the U.S. and U.K.

The consumer magazine publisher previously owned lifestyle titles such as men's magazine *Maxim*, music magazine *Blender* and consumer electronics magazine *Stuff*. It was sold in October to U.K.-based private equity firm Exponent. Dennis reported in a statement that this marks the first acquisition the international media group has made in the U.S. since it changed ownership.

## GREENBLATT TO RUN SHOW AT WARNER

Robert Greenblatt will be running the show at Warner Entertainment, the newly created unit resulting from the merger of AT&T and TimeWarner, following the departures of HBO chief executive officer Richard Plepler and Turner president David Levy.

According to a report in the *Wall Street Journal*, Greenblatt is coming aboard with the title of chairman, WarnerMedia Entertainment and direct-to-consumer. He will oversee HBO, the company's cable channels (which include TBS and TNT) and Warner Media's streaming service, which is set to launch next year.

His hire comes as WarnerMedia embarks on a re-vamping of its networks and entertainment business that the Journal report says are expected to lead to cost cuts and layoffs.

As part of the restructuring, CNN president Jeff Zucker becomes WarnerMedia's chairman of news and sports, adding the oversight of Turner's sports operations to his duties. Warner Bros. Entertainment chairman and CEO Kevin Tsujihara will take the helm at Turner's animation operations, and Gerhard Zeiler, currently president of Turner International, will become chief revenue officer.



**Robert Greenblatt**

## **NRA'S PROPAGANDA HITS NEW LOW**

The incendiary words of the National Rifle Association never cease to amaze. This is the organization that represents the country's gun industry, and its board of directors and staff seem always on the offensive when it comes to a reasonable dialogue about sensible regulations for the most lethal consumer product manufactured in this country.

The NRA's March issue of *American Rifleman* magazine took the organization's offensive to another level, however, when it published a picture of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and former Arizona Congresswoman Gabby Gifford at a news conference. The headline was unambiguous: "Target Practice."



**Kevin Foley**

In the age of Trump, this kind of propaganda is worse than irresponsible. It's an open invitation to some unhinged gun nut to take action; to put on his camo, lock, load and go after political leaders legislating things like universal background checks at the behest of those who elected them.

The familiar visage of Giffords standing behind Pelosi was no editorial accident, either. In 2011, a crackpot named Jared Lee Loughner shot Giffords in the head, killed six others and wounded 18. Loughner, who had a history of mental health and drug and alcohol abuse, legally purchased a Glock pistol and 33-round magazine. Would a background check have prevented him from buying the gun? We'll never know.

After personally experiencing the horror of that mass shooting, Giffords recovered and, along with her husband, former astronaut Mark Kelly, has become a passionate and outspoken advocate for sensible gun safety laws, which is why the NRA editors made sure she was in the picture.

Their message could not have been clearer: Mess with us, sister, and you might just get a bullet in the brain.

Of course, the magazine attempted to massage that message with a sub-head that read, "Congressional Democrats target gun owners for persecution with extreme firearms transfer bans." Oh, I get it now. It's not target practice on politicians. It's target practice on—no, wait, the "persecution" of—gun owners.

The article under the picture was written by somebody named Chris Cox, an NRA executive director. It criticized H.R. 8, the "Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2019," introduced Jan. 8, the anniversary of the mass shooting that wounded Giffords.

Let's be clear. The only thing Cox cares about is selling as many guns and as much ammo as possible. Anything that gets in the way is to be attacked, vilified, and slandered. As a public relations professional who has studied the NRA's communication tactics, the organization does this by portraying gun owners as victims of government oppression. The subtext is, "they" want to disarm you so you won't be able to fight back.

This is nonsense, of course. There are more than 300

million guns in the hands of American citizens. I'd love to know how anyone would go about confiscating all those arms.

The NRA would like you to believe universal background checks are unpopular. In fact, in the wake of the horrific Parkland, Florida mass shooting one year ago, a Quinnipiac University poll found that 97 percent of respondents, including gun owners, supported background checks.

Cox's article is nothing new. NRA leadership has a long history of viciously attacking those who oppose their agenda. In a 1995 fundraising letter, the organization's Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre called federal law enforcement agents "jack booted government thugs." In protest, former President George H. W. Bush resigned his lifetime NRA membership.

At a 2007 concert, NRA national board member, rocker Ted Nugent, called presidential candidate Barack Obama "a piece of s---," and "I told him to suck on my machine gun."

He went on to call Hillary Clinton a "worthless bitch," Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein a "worthless whore," and demanded jail for anyone who utters the words "gun control."

Cox's recent article may be somewhat more nuanced, but many of its readers will undoubtedly pick up what he's putting down.

As reported in *Newsweek* last Saturday, "Pelosi, meanwhile, has faced numerous threats, including one earlier this month from

Christopher Paul Hasson, a self-proclaimed 'white nationalist' who federal prosecutors say was plotting an attack on Democratic lawmakers. He was arrested earlier this month in Maryland, where investigators claim he had been stockpiling firearms to use in the alleged attack."

How many other Hassons are out there? And which ones will read Cox's article and the headline over it, contemplate that photo of Pelosi and Giffords, and feel encouraged to act?

"The NRA should face legal consequences," tweeted California Democratic Rep. Eric Swalwell. "But let's put them out of business with boycotts and ballot boxes. #EnoughIsEnough."

Fred Guttenberg, whose daughter Jaime was murdered in the Parkland massacre, said the picture and article "reinforces the notion that (the NRA is) a terror group."

"We must condemn this intentional, outrageous criminal incitement," wrote Christine Pelosi, the House Speaker's daughter. "We cannot allow this hate speech to stop common-sense gun violence prevention."

*Kevin Foley owns KEF Media in Atlanta.*



**From the NRA's March issue of *American Rifleman***

## **CONSERVATION GROUP WANTS PR PARTNER**

Bonn, Germany-based biodiversity activist organization the Crop Trust is seeking proposals in its search for a PR partner to provide communications activities.

The nonprofit seeks a PR partner that can perform media outreach to secure positive coverage as well as targeted op-eds in high-level news outlets, develop a response plan for hypothetical crisis scenarios, perform measuring and monitoring work, and attend a workshop at the Crop Trust's headquarters to familiarize the chosen PR partner with the work.



The planned contract will run from April 10 until June 10, 2020, with the option of a one-year renewal. Crop Trust has set a top budget for the work at \$60,000.

Proposals go to [procurement@croptrust.org](mailto:procurement@croptrust.org) no later than 11:59 p.m. (Central European Time) on March 18. Any questions regarding this RFP should be sent by March 6 to [procurement@croptrust.org](mailto:procurement@croptrust.org).

### **Download the RFP (PDF).**

Crop Trust also seeks an agency to provide graphic design, social media outreach and global media relations services for its Food Forever initiative, a campaign that promotes the conservation of crop and livestock diversity.

Deadline to submit proposal for that work is 11:59 p.m. (CET) on March 16. Those proposals should also be sent to [procurement@croptrust.org](mailto:procurement@croptrust.org).

View tender supplementary details for the Food Forever initiative work, including documents, [here](#) (link).

## **FINN TAPS J&J ALUM AS MEDICAL ADVISOR**

Finn Partners has named Joe Hulihan, MD, who had headed Johnson & Johnson's Janssen Neuroscience medical affairs team, as its medical advisor.

The 15-year J&J veteran will provide day-to-day guidance to ensure content is medically sound, compliant with regulatory requirements and valuable to patients.

Finn also added Ann Hemingway, a veteran of Edelman, Ogilvy and Havas, as a partner in its New York health group. It promoted Michael Heinley, who manages teams involved with biopharma, medical devices, diagnostics and advocacy clients, to senior partner.

## **BDO SEEKS CASH FROM BP'S BELL**

BDO, which is administering the winding down of Bell Pottinger, is seeking \$1.3M from Tim Bell for allegedly breaching his exit deal by making disparaging comments on the BBC about the collapsed firm, according to the *Times* of London.

Bell left the firm 13 months before it collapsed in September 2017 in the aftermath of a racist campaign that it ran in South Africa on part of the Gupta family.

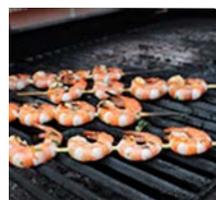
When the BBC interviewer asked if the South Africa scandal meant it was "curtains" for BP, Bell said "almost certainly."

Bell was part of the BP team that went to South Africa in 2016 for meetings with the Guptas, but he was not part of the day-to-day management of the account.

The 77-year-old was a top adviser to former UK prime minister Margaret Thatcher.

## **ACCOUNTS IN TRANSIT**

Padilla and its **Joe Smith** brand consultancy have been selected as strategic partners for the **trū® Shrimp** company's marketing and communication programs. The



Joe Smith team will develop an insights-driven brand strategy for the company, followed by naming and package design. Padilla will then extend upon that work by providing communication support for the launch of trū Shrimp's commercial product.

Balaton, MN-based trū Shrimp is an aquaculture company that uses what it says is a sustainable and environmentally approach to raise "the safest, cleanest, most natural shrimp possible."

**JG Black Book** will handle the press launch of **Pelorus**—a travel specialist offering private adventures and yacht expeditions—as it expands into the US market. Pelorus was founded by British Army vets Geordie Mackay-Lewis and Jimmy Carroll, who both have experience leading British reconnaissance units on long-range desert patrols and helicopter operations. The company's adventures feature such activities as skiing, fishing, hiking, surfing and tribal immersion.

**3rd Coast PR** has added home furnishings supplier **LumiSource** to its client roster. The agency will focus on raising LumiSource's brand and product awareness by garnering media buzz in Chicago business and industry trade outlets, providing trade show support and executing product seeding to targeted home design influencers located in key retailer markets.

**5W Public Relations** has been named PR agency of record for **Hawkeye Systems, Inc.**, a company that develops optical imaging products for military and law enforcement markets to assist with intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. The company's civilian division is focused on the development of short-range threat detection and airport anti-drone systems.

**Bob Gold & Associates** has been named PR agency for **The Pay TV Show**, a conference that brings together almost 1,000 video executives from around the world. The event takes place May 13-15 at The Westin Westminster Hotel, in greater Denver. Produced and managed by Questex LLC, owners of FierceVideo and FierceMarkets, The Pay TV Show features keynotes, fireside chats, plenary panels, and breakout sessions focusing on Advertising & Data, Content Strategies & Business Models, and UX & Technology.

**Laura Davidson Public Relations** has been appointed the public relations agency of record for **Goodstone Inn & Restaurant** and its sister property, **Playa Cativo Lodge**. Goodstone Inn & Restaurant is an 18-suite property located on 265 acres in the heart of Virginia's wine country. Playa Cativo Lodge in Costa Rica is surrounded by the Piedras Blancas National Park. The resort says it boasts some of the richest biodiversity in the world.



## **FVAP TABS AGENCY FOR VOTING PUSH**

The Federal Voting Assistance Program, the federal program that ensures military service members, families and overseas citizens the right to vote, has signed a pact with Marketing for Change Co. to provide absentee voting assistance.



The five-year, \$9.7 million contract calls for marketing, education and research services in a bid to raise awareness among Americans living abroad on issues such as voting rights, voter registration and how to request and return absentee ballots. The work will be carried out in partnership with Alexandria, VA-based agency Fors Marsh Group, with MFC leading creative and outreach efforts while Fors Marsh Group handles research.

FVAP was established by the United States Department of Defense.

Marketing for Change bills itself as a “behavior-change communications agency,” utilizing social psychology, neuroscience and behavioral economics to develop strategies and campaigns to influence human behavior.

## **SARD VERBINNEN MAPS GAP'S BREAK-UP**

Sard Verbinnen & Co. is handling Gap’s decision to spin off its Old Navy brand, which accounts for about half of its \$16.6B revenues, as a separate company.

Richard Fisher, Gap chairman, said Old Navy’s business model and customers “have increasingly diverged from our specialty brands over time, and each company now requires a different strategy to thrive moving forward.”

The Gap has struggled with higher prices than Old Navy, changing consumer preferences and competition from chains such as Zara and H&M. It will be core of a yet-to-be-named \$9B company with sister brands Banana Republic, Athletica, Intermix and Hill City. More than 230 Gap stores will be closed.

SVB’s John Christiansen, Meghan Gavigan and Devis Broda handle media for Gap’s split-up strategy.

## **O’KEEFFE JOINS SAUDI LOBBYING TEAM**

Saudi Arabia has hired O’Keeffe Global Advisors for DC support in the areas of global politics, national security, trade, tourism and investment, according to the firm’s Lobbying Disclosure Act filing.

OKGA fashions itself as an international business development and government relations shop “that works from the top down with the leadership of corporations or countries.”

Jeremiah O’Keeffe served in the US Army’s special forces and has been a contractor for the intelligence community and Pentagon. A commentator on Fox News and Fox Business, he is a favorite of President Trump, who offered him a position as special assistant for Middle East and National Security.

He declined the offer because his family lives in Dallas, according to OKGA’s website.



**Jeremiah  
O’Keeffe**

## **VENEZUELA’S GUIDÓ GETS LOBBYING HELP**

Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó has signed a pact with international law firm Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer for strategic counsel and U.S. relations work in light of that country’s ongoing presidential crisis.

Guaidó, who heads Venezuela’s National Assembly, in January declared himself interim president per the rules of its constitution, after a widely-contested 2018 election saw current Venezuela president Nicolas Maduro win another six-year term. That election was recognized by the international community as fraudulent, yet Maduro refuses to abdicate and still retains the backing of Venezuela’s military.



**Juan Guaidó**

According to Foreign Agents Registration Act documents filed in February, Arnold & Porter will advise Guaidó’s team on matters regarding such topics as U.S. economic sanctions, corporate and banking law, U.S. litigation and international arbitration. FARA filings name the foreign principal organization as Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela under President Juan Guaidó.

A formal written agreement for the work has yet to be filed with the Justice Department.

## **WELLINGTON TAPS PROSEK TO END BMS DEAL**

New York financial PR firm Prosek Partners is handling media for Wellington Management Co, the largest institutional shareholder of Bristol-Myers Squibb, which opposes its \$90B acquisition of Celgene.

“While Wellington agrees that Bristol-Myers should be active in business development that secures differentiated science and broadens the future revenue base, Wellington does not believe that the Celgene transaction is an attractive path towards accomplishing this goal,” the eight-percent owner of BMS said on Feb. 27.

BMS CEO Giovanni Caferio responded via a Feb. 27 “Colleagues” letter that expressed disappointment with Wellington’s position. He expects “that with continued discussion, shareholders will recognize the enhanced value this transaction would create and continue to believe strongly in the merits of the deal.”

Joele Frank, Wilkinson Brimmer Katcher works the BMS/Celgene deal that faces a shareholder vote on April 12.

## **COGENT CATCHES SIFMA’S OXNER**

Dave Oxner, who heads government relations at the Securities Industry and Financial Markets Assn., will join Washington PA firm Cogent Strategies on March 18.

At SIFMA since 2012, Oxner led advocacy on behalf of its more than 300 representatives of the banking, broker-dealer, asset manager and insurance businesses.

Earlier, he was senior policy advisor to Republican Senator Jerry Moran of Kansas, and a staffer on the House Financial Services Committee.

Cogent CEO Kimberley Fritts, who previously helmed the imploded Podesta Group, said Oxner’s “unique understanding of banking, tax, cybersecurity and business issues” will prove to be invaluable to her firm’s clients.

## COMMENTARY

**Michael Cohen, president Trump's former fixer and muscle**, is scheduled to report May 6 to begin a three-year prison sentence for campaign finance law violations related to work for the former Boss, who now calls him "a rat."

Since Cohen was disbarred in New York on Feb. 26, he'll need a job once released from the slammer.

Some savvy PR firm should scoop him up. Cohen put on a PR clinic during his riveting public testimony before the House Committee on Oversight and Reform on Feb. 27.



**Michael Cohen**

Right off the bat, Cohen apologized to the Members of Congress for previous untruthful testimony that he made "to protect Mr. Trump."

Warming the heart of every PR counselor, Cohen stressed the importance of staying on message—and then did—in portraying Trump as a "racist, con man and cheat."

Cohen presented his crisis manager credentials: "I proudly remember being the emergency contact for many of my children's friends when they were growing up because their parents knew that I would drop everything and care for them as if they were my own."

That crisis mindset came in handy after the \$4B Man, which in Trump's mind was the value of his brand in 2013, decided to trash president Obama's educational credentials. At that point, Trump had moved beyond the "birther" nonsense.

Trump told the AP in 2011 that he heard Obama was a "terrible student" and wondered how he got into Columbia and Harvard. "I certainly will look into it," said the real estate developer. "Let him show his record."

Once Trump launched his own presidential bid, crisis manager Cohen fired off letters to Trump's high school, colleges and the College Board that threatened legal jihad if they released his grades or SAT scores.

Cohen displayed great composure during the Q&A when Republican pit bulls Jim Jordan (OH) and Mark Meadows (NC) trashed him as nothing more than a two-bit convicted lying low-life scoundrel.

In his prepared remarks, Cohen said it best: "I knew early on in my work for Mr. Trump that he would direct me to lie to further his business interests. I am ashamed to say, that when it was for a real estate mogul in the private sector, I considered it trivial. As the president, I consider it significant and dangerous."

And the dagger: "But in the mix, lying for Mr. Trump was normalized, and no one around him questioned it. In fairness, no one around him today questions it, either."

And that includes Trump lapdogs Jordan and Meadows who manage to keep their mouths shut over the president's 8,718 lies and misleading statements documented by the *Washington Post* as of Feb. 17.

Somebody should give Cohen a PR gig. At the very least, he deserves an industry honor in the special events category for his testimony.

How about a Silver Anvil, PRSA?

**The Free Press advocacy group** that fights for the people's right to access technology and independent ownership of the media is throwing Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg a PR lifeline. He should grab it.

Facebook, Google, Twitter and YouTube have played major roles in crushing local media and stifling independent news voices. Free Press offers an opportunity for social media giants to begin to make amends, while earning priceless positive publicity.

The DC-based Free Press released a report, "Beyond Fixing Facebook," on Feb. 26 that calls for a tax on targeted online advertising on the platforms of social media giants. Proceeds would support local and diverse independent news reporting. It estimates that a two percent tax on targeted ads on online companies that earn more than \$200M in annual digital ad revenues would result in a \$1.8B windfall for local media.

The Report says the promise of Facebook and other online platforms went bust: "Throughout the past two decades, the platforms have transformed from disruptive startups to powerful conglomerates dedicated to swallowing up or undermining their competition." Amen to that.

Since Facebook launched in 2004 and through 2016, the number of newspaper employees plunged from 375,000 to 173,000. And print advertising collapsed, forcing many papers to close shop.

FP likens its targeted tax to the carbon tax countries slap on energy companies to clean up pollution. The group wants Congress to create a Public Interest Media Endowment that would distribute funds collected by the targeted advertising tax to support "local journalism, investigative reporting, media literacy, noncommercial social networks, civic-technology projects, and news and information for underserved communities."

The FP proposal is pie-in-the-sky thinking. The Republican-controlled Senate backstopped by president Trump is never going to support a new tax or toss a bone to independent media.

Facebook, however, should buy into the plan. Both it and Google have already pledged to spend millions to support journalism initiatives.

The FP throws cold water on that proposal, saying that putting the fate of US journalism in the hands of Silicon Valley billionaires is a dangerous game.

It believes people would be better served by a publicly accountable system with a consistent funding mechanism. "Making the platforms pay their fair share to help clean up the mess they've created is a good way to start," states the FP.

What do you say, Mark?

—Kevin McCauley